

# SATURDAY EVENING POST.

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## A GRAY HAIR.

BY EREN E. REXFORD.

Today, as I glanced in the mirror,  
I started with sudden fright,  
For there on my brow was gleaming  
A little line of white.

I knew what it meant, and I shivered  
To see the signal there—  
The signal of old age coming—  
The first bright, silver hair!

What a sudden thrill ran o'er me  
At sight of that silver thread!  
It told that life's sands were dropping,  
That the days of youth were dead.

And I sat down, dim and blinded,  
By a sudden rain of tears,  
As I thought of heart-wealth squandered  
In many a happy year.

On the Record-Book of Heaven,  
Against my name to-day,  
Are there any good deeds written,  
Oh, Angel of Record, say!

Am I a sinner, for your answer,  
For I know that written there  
Is a record of sin and error  
That moves you to sorrowful prayer.

I am growing old, and the angel  
Who weeps o'er each sinful deed,  
Has hung out time's warning signal,  
And looks me in the face and saith:

It seems to me like a question  
Whom import is deep and stern,  
Shall my future be purer and better?  
Will I from my idols turn?

God help me! He helpeth many  
Who out of their sorrow call;  
My past is beyond redemption;  
In the future I stand or fall.

May I heed this solemn warning,  
And the pitying angel's prayer,  
Ere the night comes darkly downward  
On my head of silver hair.

## Jasper Onslow's Wife.

BY CLEMENTINE MONTAGU,  
AUTHOR OF "THE COST OF CONQUEST," ETC.

[This serial was commenced in No. 37. Back numbers can be obtained from all newsdealers throughout the United States, or direct from this office.]

### CHAPTER XIX.

#### IN THE LID OF THE WELL.

It is strange, but true, for truth is always strange—  
Stranger than fiction.

Muriel rose early on the morning of Jasper Onslow's departure, and prepared breakfast and dressed her child before her husband returned.

"He'll be so tired," she thought, as she hastened to get things straight. "I must make him lie down and take a good sleep while baby and I go and mind the shop. Mind the shop!" she repeated, laughing softly to herself. "What a notion! Who would ever have thought that I should come to minding a shop, and being contented to do it?"

She went about preparing a tempting little meal for her husband, talking and singing little snatches of songs to her boy, who was kicking and crowing lustily on the floor, and making frantic attempts to get up on his fat legs, and so occupied that she did not hear the door open and Jasper come in. He was in the room and by her side before she saw him, and then she started back with a cry at the sight of his pale face and haggard appearance.

"Jasper," she exclaimed, "what is the matter? What has happened?"

"The matter? What do you mean?"

"Nothing."

"You look dreadfully deathlike; look at yourself in the glass. Whatever have you been doing?"

She drew him to the looking-glass as she spoke, and made him look at himself. He started violently at the reflection of his face and figure, it was so different from his ordinary trim neatness. His hair was wild and dishevelled, and his face ashy pale, save for a hectic spot which burned on either cheek. His eyes were sunken and dim, and dark rings under them told of his sleepless night.

"I don't look very bright, I must say," he said, with a nervous laugh. "I suppose I am not such a Titan of strength as I fancied myself. I shall be all right presently."

"But your clothes, Jasper—whatever have you been about? You are all over dust and whitewash; and look how you have torn your coat. There's a piece right out of the sleeve."

"So there is. It doesn't add to its beauty much, does it? I was very busy all night lifting and moving all sorts of things. Don't stare at me in that uncomfortable way, but pour me out some tea while I wash my face and hands and have a brush."

But she did stare at him. She could not make him out, his manner was so strange, and she came to the conclusion that he must have had something to drink, which had acted on an empty stomach and made him appear so odd. He looked more like himself when he emerged from the bedroom with his hair in its usual order and another coat on, though he was pale and haggard still.

"That's better," he said, as he sat down to breakfast, and Muriel heaped his plate with the most tempting morsels she could find and put his cup close to his hand. "I feel more like myself now."

"You look more like yourself. So he's really gone?"

"Yes—Mr. Colliver. Why, you had got into a brown study, Jasper."

"Had I? Yes, he's gone."

"Did he seem in good spirits when he went away?"

"I suppose so. I did not notice anything particular about him. What makes you ask, Muriel?"

"Because—well, I hardly know why—I wish he hadn't gone, Jasper. I feel as though we should never see him again, poor old man."

"What nonsense you do talk! Here, take this away—I can't eat. I suppose I have fasted too long."

"Indeed, you have, dear," Muriel said. "Do try and eat a mouthful—you will be so faint."

"I couldn't—it would choke me," he said, sharply. "Don't worry me, Muriel; let me alone."

"That's just what I mean to do," she replied. "You must lie down and rest, and I'll take my work over to the Manor and sit there in case any one comes."

"No, you won't! You are not to go there, do you hear, Muriel? You must not go there without me—never alone, mind that."

"My dear Jasper, what nonsense! I have been to the Manor dozens of times, and you must rest. Baby and I will keep house while you sleep."

"I tell you you shall not! I won't have it! How dare you contradict me?"

And while she started at him in amazement at his words and manner, a blank darkness seemed to come over his eyes, and clutching at the air, as it seemed, to steady himself, he sank in an insensible heap at her feet.

Muriel's terrified shriek brought up the landlady and her husband. They raised him between them, and laid him on the bed.

"Dead! Law bless you, my dear, no, he ain't," the landlady said, in answer to Muriel's frightened face and incoherent words. "He's all right—it's a faint. Maybe he's a bit overtired, that's all."

It seemed so, for Jasper presently opened his eyes, and said something to the same effect. He would lie still for awhile, he said, and Muriel might just go to the Manor and see that all was right.

"What made you say just now I was not to go?" she asked, after she had administered some brandy to her husband, and saw him look a little more like himself once more.

"Did I say so?"

"Most emphatically," she replied, with a smile. "I never heard you speak so before."

The peg, and hung it where he could not see it.

Then she kissed him, and went away with her baby on her arm and the key of the old house in her pocket. The echoes seemed to her unusually hollow and sounding as she flung back the heavy door and went into the passage, and she was glad to get into the brighter and more familiar-looking shop.

"It is because I know there is no one here," she said to herself, as she took out her work and sat down to write away the morning, till Jasper should feel well enough to come back. "But the place feels like a grave for all that—like a house feels when death is in it."

It was quite a relief when a man came to the door on some trivial errand, and stood talking for a moment.

"It's pleasant to see you here, ma'am," he said. "The old Manor and its master are very different since you came."

"Improved, I hope," she said. "You may say that, ma'am. He was as disagreeable an old bear as ever I see before your husband and you joined him. He's better now. He gave me good morning quite friendly when he went away."

"Were you here when he went away?" asked Muriel, scarcely knowing what prompted her to put the question.

"Oh, yes, ma'am. I was just going down to the shore when I see him come out, and very tottering and frail he seemed. I wondered as some one wasn't with him."

"He wouldn't let any one go with him," Muriel replied. "I wanted him to take my husband, but he wouldn't hear of it."

"Ah, that's just his way, ma'am. I hope he'll come back safe, poor old fellow. He was quiet enough in his way, and Limes-house wouldn't seem to get on without him."

She knew the man well—a boatman who had often done odd jobs for her husband, and somehow it was a relief to speak to some one who had seen Jasper Collier that morning. Every one seemed to share her uneasiness about him except Jasper; but men with plenty of occupation are apt to be slow to notice the signs of weakness or illness in others, and he had marked no special signs of illness about the old man.

Then her thoughts strayed oddly to Jasper's torn coat. It kept presenting itself to her mind with a strange persistence.

It was rather a peculiar coat—a house jacket made by herself out of a piece of dark brown Indian stuff given her by Jasper, who had turned over quite a pile of drapery goods to her for her use. Very thickly lined, and she had accepted them, and made her boy gray with velvet and brocade and pieces of rare lace. She had a dress of a curious Indian fabric that made her look the old man declared, like a fairy princess, and Jasper had a comfortable, thin-looking dressing gown and this coat, the most ordinary garment of the lot.

He wore it all day and every day over his work, and the Manor being so near, and Limes-house people not very particular, he generally went backwards and forwards in it.

She was pondering how she should mend it, for she had not a bit of the stuff left, when she suddenly remembered a great basket of odds and ends that generally stood in a corner of the shop. Jasper Collier used to thrust all sorts of things into it which he sorted out from among his purchases, and she was free to go to it when she wanted scraps or anything of no value.

"There may be a bit," she said. "I'll look; but I am afraid it will be in vain. Why, where is the basket gone to? It used to be here."

It had been moved, and she sought in vain for one or two of the old rooms where things of small value were sometimes stowed away.

"They must have taken it into that horrid room," she said to herself. "Ugh! I hate to go there! I wonder if the door is open."

She had a strange dislike to the queer back room with the old well in it, and she quite shivered as she tried the door. It was locked—that is, the key had been turned, but Jasper had not shut it close, so that the shut bolt was useless, and she went through.

The air of the passage seemed to strike dull and heavy, and she almost retraced her steps, so nervous did she feel.

"Pshaw! what a fool I am!" she said, going forward. "It is the thought of that dreadful well, I suppose. Well, I needn't look at it."

The basket she was looking for was there, but not a bit of anything could she find that would serve her purpose, and she turned to go. Something caught her eye, hanging, as it were, to the lid of the well, and stooping down, she tried to pull it away. It was firmly held between the wood and the brickwork, and Muriel let it go with a faint shriek, as though an asp had stung her. It was the missing piece of the coat she had hung up out of Jasper's sight before she had come away.

### CHAPTER XX.

#### A MADMAN.

Mad as the sea and wind when both contend,  
Which is the mightier.

Muriel stared at the bit of brown rag in terrified astonishment.

"How did it come there?" she asked, looking at it, and then she laughed at her own fears.

Of course Jasper had been kneeling there, doing something on the floor, and had caught his sleeve. But her heart beat thick and fast as she pulled at it. It came away in her hand, but before she had seen and felt that it had not been caught on anything, but held between the lid and the edge of the well.

She looked away, sick and giddy, to go back to the front of the house to her child, when a slight noise over her head, and a sudden dimming of the light, made her look up, and she saw a man's face looking down at her through the skylight. It was a dark, wild-looking face, and seemed to hold her entranced with sick terror, as it gazed at her with evil-looking eyes. The skylight was a little open, but it was heavily barred underneath, so that the man, if he had any evil intent, could not get at her that way. But he did not seem to leave any; he was laughing in a dazed, blotted sort of way, and watching her, apparently much amused.

"You can't lift the lid," he said. "But he did—ha, ha! I can tell what he had there. I know."

"What is hidden there?"

"Treasure—such a treasure—one that the rats will find; but not the diamond, no, not the diamond. He took that. I saw him hide it."

"He—who?"

"The man who went out and came back again—the wolf in sheep's clothing, the daw in borrowed feathers. He thought it was all secret; but I was up here watching. I couldn't come down for fear they would catch me. You won't let them catch me, will you?"

"Who are you, and what do you want?" asked Muriel, in extreme terror, beginning to have a faint glimmering that the man

was mad, but not feeling particularly reassured thereby.

"Who am I? Well, I must not tell that till I've seen Teresa—I promised Teresa I wouldn't. She is my—"

"Your what?"

"Ah, that's just what I mustn't tell. I want to get to her; I'm going to kill her. But that's a secret, and I came to him for some money. He'll give it me when he comes up from the well. I'm waiting for him."

"Down the well?" gasped Muriel, terrified almost beyond endurance, yet fascinated by the strange creature's words into listening to him.

"What do you mean? What do you mean?"

"I'll come down and tell you," he said. "Wait for me."

His moving away from the window broke the spell which seemed to be upon her, and with a terrified cry she fled back into the shop, and throwing herself into a chair, she burst into a fit of hysterical tears.

She was sobbing in short, quick gasps, and did not hear the footsteps of three persons who entered the shop, and were standing staring at her in the most ungratified amazement.

"Beg pardon, ma'am," said the first, a policeman who knew her well by sight. "Is anything wrong?"

"Not much, thank you," she said, drying her eyes. "I have been a little frightened, that is all."

"Can we see Mr. Onslow?" the man asked. "I know Mr. Collier is gone."

"Yes, he went this morning," she answered. "And Mr. Onslow is not here either, but I can take any message for him. I am very glad to see you, policeman," she said, quite recovered from her agitation. "For I have just been terribly frightened, and—"

"By a man, miss," struck in one of the strangers, "a powerful, rather formidable-looking man, but perfectly polite and respectful."

"Yes," she replied, wondering. "By a man certainly."

"Rather mad-looking, eh?" he asked. "Very."

Jasper was better, though very pale still, and with a strange set expression on his face. The landlady had burst into his room with the astounding intelligence that there was something wrong at the Manor, for that the policeman there were searching the house.

"Searching the house?" he exclaimed. "What for?"

"I don't know, sir," he replied. "They do say something dreadful has happened, I can't rightly learn what."

That he rushed, "with a face like death," the woman declared, and was much relieved to find that it was nothing worse than a search for an escaped lunatic that was afoot.

"My darling, you must come here no more alone," he said, clasping Muriel in his arms, and striving to soothe her agitation. "I cannot have you terrified like this."

"It was very foolish of me, dear; but the poor creature said such dreadful things," she said, with a shiver.

"What about?"

"About some one being down that well, and about treasures and diamonds hidden somewhere."

"The usual style of lunatic talk. I'll take you home, dear, and then I'll go to the station and find out who the poor creature is, and where he comes from. You must come no more to the Manor without me till Mr. Collier returns, promise me you will not."

"I don't think I shall want to," she said, shivering. "It seems a place full of horrors, Jasper."

She did not tell him of the piece of cloth she had found and hidden away in her pocket; somehow she could not speak of it now of the nameless horror it had caused her. Another time she would ask her husband how it came there, and he would tell her; but not now, the dread was too fresh—she could not speak her fears.

Jasper took her home and went to the police office to see who it was who had so frightened his wife.

There was no mystery about it now. The man was an escaped lunatic from a private asylum in Leicestershire, his name Henry Maynard, and the two men were keepers from the establishment sent out to search for him. He was covered with dust and perspiration when Jasper Onslow saw him, and his face was bruised and his lip cut from a blow given by the taller of the two keepers, whom he had tried to bite; but for all that it seemed as though the distorted features were familiar to him, and that he had seen them before.

"I think not, sir," the keeper said. "He does not belong to these parts."

"Where does he belong to?"

"Liverpool way, somewhere. At least, the doctor had him from there, and I wish he was back there. I do," he added, eyeing his patient with a look the reverse of affectionate.

"Why? Is he dangerous?"

"Worriesome, sir, worriesome; not exactly dangerous, but more difficult to deal with. It's easy with the dangerous ones—we know what to do with them. A straight jacket and a padded room, and there you are; but his sort, specially when the orders is as they've to be treated well, are the danger and all to deal with."

"There he has friends?"

"None as ever I heard of, but for all that he's well paid for, and the orders is to treat him very kind and all that, and see what it comes to. I tell you, I'd as lief have a wild beast to deal with as you."

The madman, thus apostrophized, made no reply, but kept his eyes fixed on Jasper Onslow with a cold, malignant stare.

"The confound!" he said, in answer to a rough push from the keeper. "There's no hurry. I won't tell the secret now, but to and by, when I have found Teresa and killed her, I'll bring her back and put her down the well along with you know who, and then we'll wear the jewels and spend the money, ha! ha! ha!"

"There, there, my dear man, my dear man," said the superintendent. "And how better can it be for the future? What manner this madman's talk is to be seen."

After some time, in a rare and Jasper stood a few minutes in the station chatting about the Manor and Jasper Collier.

"I'm glad to hear of some one in charge this time," the superintendent said. "That old house has been a nuisance to us when he has been away before. Last time he went away it was two months before we heard of him."

"He's not a dangerous man, is he?"

Jasper said, looking out of the window. "He did as well as to be frightened if we did not hear from him."

"Do you think he will go about in that odd way? I was at my man's house this morning and then he looked unusually well and cheerful."

"My man, but all he could do to persuade him not to go," Jasper said. "But it was a mercy he found a way to be so friendly made up."

"Well, I hope no harm will come to him, poor old fellow. He was a queer old man, but harmless and kind-hearted enough."

No tidings came from Jasper Collier, and Muriel went no more to the Manor. The impression of what had passed in the room with the well in it grew fainter as the days wore on, and she was beginning to laugh at her own fears and to regard the torn rag she had found as an accident. She rolled the coat and the rag up together, and put them away.

"Some day I will have a talk to Jasper about it," she said to herself.

But the day never came, and the longer the time that passed the more difficult it seemed to broach the subject.



















her elbow on the mantel-piece, her eyes hidden by her hand. Thus she remained for some minutes, and Lucy thought how sad she looked.

But Lucy felt hungry, and was casting longing glances to the table. She wondered how long her governess meant to keep it waiting. "Madame Vane," cried she, presently, "don't you know that tea is ready?"

This caused Madame Vane to raise her eyes. They fell on the pale boy at her feet. She made no immediate answer, only placed her hand on Lucy's shoulder.

"Oh, Lucy dear, I—I have many sorrows to bear."

"The tea will warm you, and there is some nice jam," was Miss Lucy's offered consolation.

"Their greeting, tender as it may be, is surely over by this time," thought Lady Isabel, an expression something like mockery curving her lips. "I will venture again."

Only to see him with his wife's face on his breast, and his lips bent upon it. But they had heard her this time, and she had to advance, in spite of her spirit of misery and her whitened features.

"Would you be so good, sir, as to come and look at William?" she asked, in a low tone, of Mr. Carlyle.

"What for?" interpreted Barbara.

"He looks so very ill. I do not like his looks. I am fearful whether he can be worse than we have thought."

They went to the grey parlor, all three of them. Mr. Carlyle was in first, and had taken a long, silent look at William before the others entered.

"What is he doing on the floor?" exclaimed Barbara at her astonishment. "He should not be on the floor, Madame Vane."

"He lays himself down there at the dusk hour, and I cannot get him up again. I try to persuade him to use the sofa, but it is of no use."

"The floor will not hurt him," said Mr. Carlyle. "This was the dark shade. His boy's failing health."

William opened his eyes. "What's that?"

"Don't you feel well, William?"

"Oh, yes, I'm very well, but I'm tired."

"Why do you lie down here?"

"I like lying here. Papa, that pretty white rabbit of mine is dead."

"Indeed? Suppose you get up and tell me all about it."

"I don't know about it myself yet," said William, slowly rising. "The gardener told Lucy when she was out just now. I did not go, I was tired. He said—"

"What has tired you?" interrupted Mr. Carlyle, taking hold of the boy's hand.

"Oh, nothing. I am always tired."

"Do you tell Mr. Wainwright that you are tired?"

"No. Why should I tell him? I wish he would not order me to take that nasty medicine, that cool liver oil."

"It makes me sick. I always feel sick at it," wailed Madame Vane, looking at her with a look of despair.

"Cream," repeated Mr. Carlyle, turning his eyes on Madame Vane.

"I have known cream to do a vast deal of good in a case like William's," she observed. "I believe that no better medicine can be given, that it has, in fact, no such state."

"It can be tried," said Mr. Carlyle.

"Pray give your orders, Madame Vane, for anything you think may be beneficial to him," Mr. Carlyle added. "You have had more experience with children than I, Joyce."

"What does Wainwright say?" interrupted Mr. Carlyle, speaking to his wife, his tone low.

"I don't always see him when he comes, Archibald," Madame Vane said, I believe.

"Oh, dear!" cried Lucy, "can't we have tea? I want some bread and jam."

Mr. Carlyle turned round, smiled, and nodded at her. "Patience is good for little girls, Miss Lucy. Would you like some bread and jam, my boy?"

William shook his head. "I can't eat jam. I am not hungry."

Mr. Carlyle cast a long and intent look at him, and then left the room. Lady Isabel followed him, her thoughts full of her ailing child.

"Do you think him very ill, sir?" she whispered.

"I think he looks so. What does Mr. Wainwright say?"

"He says nothing to me. I have not inquired his true condition. Until to-night it did not occur to me that there was any apprehension."

"Does he look so much worse to-night?"

"Not any worse than customary. Last night he has looked just like this in an evening. It was a remark of Hannah's that aroused my alarm; she thinks he's on the road to death. What can we do to save him?"

"She clasped her hands as she spoke, in the intensity of her emotion. She almost forgot, as they stood there together talking of the welfare of the child, their child, that he was no longer her husband. Almost, not quite, utterly impossible would it be for her wholly to forget the dreadful present. Neither he nor the child could belong to her in this world."

"A strange remark of the throat in her wild despair, a neck courting, as she turned from him, his last words ringing in her ears."

"I shall call in further advice for him, Madame Vane."

William was clinging round Mrs. Carlyle, in a clinging attitude, when she re-entered the grey parlor. "I know what I could eat, mamma, if you'd let me have it," cried he, in answer to her remembrance that he must eat something.

"What could you eat?"

"Cheese! Cheese with tea!" laughed Mrs. Carlyle.

"For the last week or two he has fancied strange things, the effect of a diseased appetite," exclaimed Madame Vane. "But if I allow them to be brought in he barely tastes them."

"I am sure, mamma, I could eat some cheese now," said William.

"You may have it," answered Mrs. Carlyle.

As she turned to leave the room, the impatient knock and ring of a visitor was heard. Barbara wondered who could be arriving at that, their dinner hour. Sailing majestically into the hall, her lips compressed, her aspect threatening, came Miss Corry.

Now, it turned out that Miss Corry had been standing at her own window, grimly viewing the ill doings of the street, from the fine housemaid opposite, who was enjoying a flirting interview with the baker, to the ragged archway puthpaling in the gutter and the dust. And there she caught sight of the string, justice and others, who came flowing out of the office of Mr. Carlyle.

No many of them were they that Miss Corry involuntarily thought of a conjurer flinging a moment of a hat—the faster they come, the more it seems there are to come—

"What on earth is up?" cried Miss Corry,

pressing her nose flat against the pane, that she might see better.

They filed off, some one way, some another. Miss Corry's curiosity was keener than her appetite, for she stayed on the watch, although just informed that her dinner was served. Presently Mr. Carlyle appeared, and she knocked at the window with her knuckles. He did not hear it; he had turned off at a quick pace toward home.

Miss Corry's temper rose.

"The clerk came out next, one after another, and the last was Mr. Dill. He was less hurried than Mr. Carlyle had been, and heard Miss Corry's signal."

"What, in the name of wonder, did all that stream of people want at the office?" began she when Mr. Dill had entered in obedience to it.

"That was the deputation, Miss Corry."

"What deputation?"

"The deputation to Mr. Archibald. They want him to become their member."

"Member of what?" cried she, not guessing at the actual meaning.

"Of Parliament, Miss Corry," to replace Mr. Attley. The gentlemen came to solicit him to be put in nomination."

"Solicit a 'donkey'?" trilledly uttered Miss Corry, for the tidings did not meet her approbation. "Did Archibald turn them out again?"

"He gave them no direct answer, ma'am. He will consider of it between now and to-morrow morning."

"Consider of it?" shrieked she. "Why, he'd never never be such a flat as to comply. He goes into Parliament! What next?"

"Why should he not, Miss Corry? I'm sure I should be proud to see him there."

Miss Corry gave a snarl. "You are proud of things more odd than even, John Dill. Remember that fine shirt front!"

"What has come of it?" Is it laid up in lavender?"

"Not exactly in lavender, Miss Corry. It lies in the drawer, for I have never liked to put it on since, after what you said."

"Why don't you sell it at half price, and buy a couple of good useful ones with the money?" returned she tartly. "Better that than keep the foppish thing as a witness of your folly. Perhaps he'll be buying embroidered fronts next, if he goes into that idle do-nothing House of Commons. I'd rather enter myself for six months at the treadmill."

"Oh, Miss Corry! I don't think you have well considered it. It's a great honor, and worthy of him. He will be elevated above us all, as it were, and he deserves to be."

"Elevate him on a weathercock!" raged Miss Corry. "There, you may go. I've heard quite enough."

Brushing past the old gentleman, leaving him to depart or not, as he might please, she went straight upstairs, flung on her shawl and bonnet, and strode down again. Her servant looked considerably surprised, and addressed her as she crossed the hall.

"Your dinner, ma'am!" he ventured to say.

"What's my dinner to you?" returned Miss Corry, in her wrath. "You have had yours."

Away she strode. And thus it happened that she was at East Lyme almost as soon as Mr. Carlyle.

"What's Archibald?" began she, with out ceremony, the moment she saw Barbara.

"He is here. Is anything the matter?"

"He is here, hearing the voice, came out, and she pounced upon him with her tongue."

"What's this about your becoming the new member for West Lyme?"

"West Lyme wishes it," said Mr. Carlyle. "So do you, Corry."

"Sit down, Corry," returned she, keeping on her feet. "I want my questions answered. Of course you will decline."

"On the contrary, I have made up my mind to accept."

Miss Corry untied the strings of her bonnet, and flung them behind her.

"Have you counted the cost?" she asked, and there was something scolding in her solemn tone.

"I have given it consideration, Corry, both as regards money and time. The expense will be not worth naming, should there be no opposition. And if there is—"

"Ay!" growled Miss Corry. "If there is—"

"Well, I am not without a few hundred to spare for the plaything," he said, turning upon her the good humored light of his fine countenance.

Miss Corry emitted some dismal moans.

"That ever I should have lived to see this day!" To hear money talked of as though it were dirt. And what's to become of my business?" she sharply asked. "Is that to be let run to rack and ruin, while you are kicking up your heels in that wicked London, under plea of being at the House night after night?"

"Corry," he gravely said, "were I dead, Dill could carry on the business just as well as it is being carried on now. I might go into a foreign country for seven years, and come back to find the business as flourishing as ever, for Dill could keep it together. And even were the business to fall off, though I tell you it will not do so, I am independent of it."

Miss Corry faced tartly round, upon Barbara.

"Have you been setting him on to this?"

"I think he had made up his mind before he spoke to me. But," added Barbara, in her truth, "I urged him to accept it."

"Oh, you did! Nicer moped and miserable you'll be here, if he goes to London for months upon the stretch! You did not think of that, perhaps?"

"But he would not leave me here," said Barbara, her eyelashes becoming wet at the thought, as she unconsciously moved to her husband's side. "He would take me with him."

Miss Corry made a pause, and looked at them alternately.

"Is that decided?" she asked.

"Of course it is," laughed Mr. Carlyle, willing to joke the subject and his sister into good humor.

"Would you wish to separate man and wife, Corry?"

She made no reply. She rapidly tied her bonnet-strings, the ribbon trembling ominously in her fingers, and she was gone.

"You are not going, Corry! You must stay to dinner, now you are here—it is ready—and we will talk this further over afterward."

"This has been dinner enough for me for one day," spoke she, putting on her gloves.

"That I should have liked to see my father's son throw up his business, and change himself into a lazy, slack-up Parliament man!"

"I've stay and dine with us, Corry! I think I can subdue your prejudices, if you will let me talk to you."

"If you want to talk to me about it, why did you not come in when you left the office?" cried Miss Corry, in a greater amount of wrath than she had shown yet.

"And there's no doubt that, in his not having done so, lay one of the sore points."

"I did not think of it," said Mr. Carlyle. "I should have come in and told you of it to-morrow morning."

"I dare say you would!" she ironically

answered. "Good evening to you both."

And, in spite of their persuasion, she quitted the house, and went stalking down the avenue.

Two or three days more, and the address of Mr. Carlyle, to the inhabitants of West Lyme, appeared in the local papers, while the walls and posts convenient were embellished with various colored placards.

"Vote for Carlyle." "Carlyle forever!"

Wonders never cease. Surprises are the lot of man; but, perhaps a greater surprise had never been experienced, by those who knew what was what, than when it went forth to the world that Sir Francis Levison had converted himself from—from what he was—into a red-hot politician.

Had he been offered the post of prime minister? Or did his conscience smite him, as was the case with a certain gallant captain renowned in song? Neither the one nor the other. The simple fact was, that Sir Francis Levison was in a state of peculiar embarrassment, and required something to prop him up, some snug sinecure—plenty of that, and nothing to do.

Patch himself up he must. But how? He had tried the tables, but luck was against him; he made a desperate venture on the turf, a grand coup that would have set him on his legs for some time; but the venture turned out badly. In the course of time he was a defaulter. He began then to think there was nothing for it but to drop into some nice government nest, where, as I have told you, there would be plenty to get and nothing to do. Any place with much to do would not suit him, or he it; he was too empty-headed for work requiring talent; you may have remarked that a man given to Sir Francis Levison's pursuits generally is.

He dropped into something good, or that, at least, he thought so, when the Earl of Headbroke, who was one of the ministers in the Upper House, told him that he was a connection of Lord Headbroke's, he never would have obtained it, and very dubiously the minister consented to try him. Of course, a condition was that he should enter Parliament at the first opportunity, his vote to be at the disposal of the ministry—rather a shaky ministry—and supposed, by some, to be on its last legs. And this brings us to the present time.

In a handsome drawing-room, at Eaton Square, one midday afternoon, sat a lady young and handsome. Her eyes were of violet blue, her hair was auburn, her complexion delicate; but there was a stern look of anger, amounting to sullenness, on her well-formed features, and her pretty face was beating the carpet in passionate impatience. This was Lady Levison.

The doings of the past had been coming home to her for some time now—past doings, be they good or be they ill, are sure to come home, and she had called for another, and bring them forth with them.

In the years past, many years past now—Francis Levison had lost his heart—on whatever the thing might be that, with him, did duty for one—Lady Levison. He had despised her once to Lady Isabel. As Lord Thomas says in the old ballad; but that was done to suit his own purpose, for he had never, at any period, cared for Lady Isabel. He had called her a fool, and in secret they engaged themselves to each other. Blanche's sister, Lydia Chalfoner, two years older than herself, suspected it, and taxed Blanche with it. Blanche, true to her compact of keeping it a secret, denied it with many protestations. "She did not care for Captain Levison," rather disliked him, in fact. "So much the better," was Miss Levison's reply, for she had not respect for Captain Levison, and deemed him an unlikely man to marry.

Years went on, and poor, unhappy Blanche Chalfoner remained faithful to her love.

He played fast and loose with her—protesting attachment for her in secret, and visiting at the house; perhaps he feared an outbreak from her, an exposure that might be anything but pleasant, did he throw off all relations between them. Blanche summed up her courage and spoke to him, urging the marriage; she had not yet glared at him, but that his intention of marrying her (had he ever possessed such) was over. But men are always cowards. Sir Francis shrank from an explanation, and so far forgot home or as to murmur some indistinct promise that the wedding should be speedy.

Lydia Chalfoner had married, and been left a widow, well off. She was Mrs. Waring, and at her house resided Blanche, for the girls were orphans. Blanche was coming to her home, and she was to be married. Far more beautiful, was she than the long-continued disappointment, the heart burnings, were telling upon her. Her hair was then, her face was pinched, her form had lost its roundness. "Marry her, indeed!" scoffed, to himself, Sir Francis Levison.

There came to Mrs. Waring's, upon a Christmas visit, a younger sister, Alice Chalfoner, a fair girl of twenty years, she blended generally with an angel in her countenance, and she was to be married. Blanche had ever been, and Francis Levison, who had not seen her since she was a child, fell—as she would have called it—in love with her. Love! He became her shadow; he whispered sweet words in her ear, he turned her head gaily with his own vanity, and he offered her marriage. She accepted him, and preparations for the ceremony immediately began. Francis Levison, who had nothing to do, was to be married.

And what of Blanche? Blanche was stunned. A despairing stupor took possession of her; and when she awoke from it, desperation set in. She insisted upon an interview with Sir Francis; and evade it he could not, though he tried hard.

Will it be believed that he denied the past? that he met with mocking civility and indignant reminders of what had been between them? Love? Marriage? Nonsense! her fancy had been too much at work. Finally, he defied her to prove that he had regarded her with more than ordinary friendship, or had ever hinted at such a thing as a union.

She could not prove it. She had not so much as a scrap of paper written on by him; she had not a single friend or enemy to come forward and testify that they had known her to love him, or that he loved her. He had been too wary for that. Moreover, there were her own solemn protestations to her sister Lydia that there was not anything between her and Francis Levison; who would believe her if she veered round now, and avowed those protestations were false? No; she found that she was in a sinking ship, there was no chance of saving.

But one chance she did determine to try—an appeal to Alice. Blanche Chalfoner's eyes were suddenly and rudely opened to the business of the man, and she was aware now how thoroughly unfit he was to become the husband of her sister. It struck her that only misery could result from the union, and that, if possible, Alice should be saved from entering upon it. Would she have married him herself, then? Yes. But it was a different thing for that fair, fresh young Alice; she had not wasted her life's best years in waiting for him.

When the family had gone to rest, and

the house was quiet, Blanche Chalfoner proceeded to her sister's bedroom. Alice had not begun to undress; she was sitting in a comfortable chair before the fire, her feet on the fender, reading a love-letter from Sir Francis.

"Alice, I am come to tell you a story," said she, quietly. "Will you hear it?"

"In a minute. Stop a bit," repeated Alice. She finished the perusal of the letter, put it aside, and then spoke again.

"What did you say, Blanche? A story?"

Blanche nodded. "Several years ago, there was a fair young girl, none too rich, in our station of life. A gentleman, who was none too rich either, sought and gained her love. He could not marry; he was not rich, I say. They loved on in secret, hoping for better times, she wearing out her years and her heart. Oh, Alice! I cannot describe to you how she loved him—how she continued to love him up to this moment. Through evil report she clung to him tenaciously and tenderly as the vine clings to its trellis, for the world spoke ill of him."

"Who was the young lady?" interrupted Alice. "Is this a fable of romance, Blanche, or a real history?"

"A real history. I knew her. All those years—years and years, I say—he kept leading her on to love, letting her think that his love was hers. In the course of time he succeeded to a fortune, and the bar to their marriage was over. He was abroad when he came into it, but returned home at once; their intercourse was renewed, and her fading heart woke up once more to life. Still, the marriage did not come on; he said nothing of it, and she spoke to him. Very soon, now, should it be, was his answer, and she continued to live on in hope."

"Go on, Blanche," cried Alice, who had grown interested in the tale, never suspecting it could have a personal interest.

"Yes, I will go on. Would you believe, Alice, that almost immediately after this last promise, he saw one whom he fancied he should like better, and asked her to be his wife, forsaking the one to whom he was bound by every tie of honor—repudiating all that had been between them, even his own words and promises?"

"How disgraceful! Were they married?"

"They are to be. Would you have such a aunt?"

"I!" returned Alice, quite indignant at the question. "It is not likely that I would."

"That man, Alice, is Sir Francis Levison."

Alice Chalfoner gave a start, and her face became scarlet. "How dare you say so, Blanche? It is not true. Who was the girl, pray? She must have traded him."

"She has not traded him," was the subdued answer. "The girl was his wife, and she is now his wife."

"Alice, throwing back her head resentfully, 'He told me I might expect something of this, that you had fancied him in love with you, and were angry because he had chosen me.'"

Blanche turned upon her with streaming eyes; she could no longer control her emotion. "Alice, my sister, all the pride is gone out of me; all the reverence that woman loves to observe as to her wrongs and her inward feelings, I have broken for you this night. As sure as I have truth, heaven above us, I have told you but the truth. Until you came, I was engaged to Francis Levison."

An unnatural scene ensued. Blanche, provoked at Alice's rejection of her words, told all the ill she knew, or had heard, of the man; she dwelt upon his conduct with regard to Lady Isabel Carlyle, his heartless and cruel treatment of that unhappy lady. Alice was passionate and fiery. She professed not to believe a word of her sister's wrongs, and as to the other stories, she was no affairs of hers, she said; what had she to do with his past life?

But Alice Chalfoner did believe; her sister's earnestness and distress, as she told the tale, carried conviction with them. She did not venture much on Sir Francis; he was not enticed round her heart, as she would have thought; but she was dazzled with the prospect of so good a settlement in life, and she would not give him up. If Blanche broke her heart—why, she must break it. But she need not have mixed taunts and jeers with her refusal to believe; she need not have triumphed openly over Blanche. Was it well done? Was it the work of an affectionate sister? As we saw, so shall we reap. She married Sir Francis Levison, leaving Blanche to her broken heart, or to any other calamity that might grow out of the injustice. And there sat Lady Levison now, her three years of marriage having served to turn her love for Francis into contempt and hate.

A little boy, two years old, the only child of the marriage, was playing about the room. His mother took no notice of him; she was buried in all-absorbing thought; thought which caused her lips to contract and her eyes to scowl. Sir Francis entered, his attitude lounging, his air listless. Lady Levison roused herself, but no pleasant manner of tone was hers, as she set herself to address him.

"I want some money," she said.

"So do I," he answered.

An impatient stamp of the foot and a haughty tone. "And I must have it. I want. I told you yesterday that I must. Do you suppose I can go on without a sixpence out of my pocket, day after day?"

"Do you suppose it is any use to put yourself in this fury?" retorted Sir Francis. "A dozen times a week do you bother me for money, and a dozen times I tell you I have got none. I have got none for myself. You may as well ask that baby for money, as ask me."

"I wish he had never been born!" passionately uttered Lady Levison. "Unless he had had a different father."

That the last sentence, and the bitter scorn of its tone, would have provoked a reprisal from Sir Francis, his flashing countenance betrayed. But at that moment a servant entered the room.

"I beg your pardon, sir. That man Brown forced his way into the hall, and—"

"I can't see him, I won't see him," interrupted Sir Francis, backing to the doorway, his face as white as paper, and his eyes looking very like a specter, as if he had completely lost his presence of mind. Lady Levison's lip curled.

"We got rid of him, sir, after a dreadful deal of trouble. I was about to say, but while the door was open in the dispute, Mr. Meredith entered. He has gone into the library, sir, and he vows he won't stir until he sees you, whether you are sick or well."

A moment's pause, a half-muttered oath, and then Sir Francis quitted the room. The servant retired, and Lady Levison caught up the child.

"Oh, Franky dear," she wailed forth, burying her face in his warm neck, "I'd leave him for good and all, if I dared; but I fear he might keep you."

Now, the secret was, that for the last three days Sir Francis had been desperately ill, obliged to keep his bed, and could not, nobody, his life depending upon quiet. Such was the report, or something equivalent to it, which had gone in to Lord Head-

broth (or, rather to the official office, for that renowned chief was himself, out of town); it had also been delivered to all callers at Sir Francis Levison's house. The real truth being that Sir Francis was as well as you or I, but, from something which had transpired touching one of his numerous debts, did not dare to show himself. That morning the matter had been arranged, patched up for a time.

"My stars, Levison!" began Mr. Meredith, who was a whippet-in of the ministry, "what a row there is about you! Why, you look as well as ever you were!"







